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SPEECH

OF

HON. REUBEN DAVIS, OF MISSISSIPPI,

ON

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THE STATE OF THE UNION;

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 22, 1858.

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SPEECH.

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. DAVIS, of Mississippi, said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The world had arrived at a new era. An adventurer had gone forth and discovered a new continent. It had been peopled; generations had been born and passed away. The heroes of the Revolution are in possession of the country. As a race, they had no parallel in ancient or modern times. From their cradle they had looked out upon the noble forests and lofty mountains which surrounded them, and in their infant minds the grand and sublime had been awakened; they had stood upon the banks of our mighty rivers, and gazed on their waters rapidly dashing on in freedom to old ocean; they had seen the noble eagle leave his mountain home, floating in blue ether, and heard his wild scream of liberty; and from these they had caught the inspiration of freedom, and its love had become a part of their nature. In the enjoyment of their political rights they felt the oppressive hand of British dominion, and with the sword they severed the tie of dependence, and established this Republic; the Constitution under which we live is adopted, and we rapidly pass from an infant and feeble state, to our present important position amidst the nations of the earth.

It is now announced in the Senate Chamber "that the question of slavery in the Federal Territories involves a dynastical struggle of two antagonistical systems, the labor of slaves and the labor of freemen, for the mastery in the Federal Union." This, sir, is but another mode of expressing the sectional controversy which has so long existed between the free and slave States of this Union, and which, if not arrested, must commence its decline and ultimate overthrow. The word "dynastical," in the use made of it in the above quotation, gives to each system the importance of sovereignty—rule-line of kings. Thus we are told two distinct systems—two distinct Governments, sovereignties opposite in interests, opposite in pursuit, antagonistical—exist upon this

continent, and now struggle for superiority, for mastery in the Federal Union. This assertion is important, if true, and ought to be rendered intelligible to the whole American people, because if such an antagonism does naturally and necessarily exist, the one or the other section of the Union must become a conquered province, and rendered subservient and subordinate.

Now, in a subsequent portion of my remarks, I shall endeavor to show that no such antagonism exists between free and slave labor on this continent as the announcement implies; yet for the present—it having been asserted by the acknowledged leader of the free-labor system—I must examine its purport. The object of this Government was to advance the common good of all the States, and not to unite under one Government two discordant elements, the one to be corrected by the other. If, after seventy years, it is now discovered that such antagonism of systems does exist, it only affords a reason for a dissolution of the Union, which must take place the very moment our people are fully convinced of the existence of this necessity. I regret, Mr. Chairman, that the distinguished Senator who gave utterance to this expression, had not afforded the country evidence of its truth. I deny any antagonism which justifies the struggle at this time existing between the free and slave States. The struggle is one of aggression and resistance, waged in violation of the constitutional compact; and is incited by a spirit of avarice and injustice.

The first object of the struggle has been, and is, to deprive the people of the slave States of any interest in acquired territory, and thus prevent their expansion. This looks chiefly to a limitation of their political power. In such a contest as this there is no necessary or natural antagonism between systems of labor; it is the offspring of injustice. And the spirit which induces it will not be satisfied with the mere possession of power; it has a more important aim beyond. It either intends the emancipation of the slaves, or the enforcement of a system of revenue which will oppress slave labor and enrich capital. If

either or both these objects enter into the struggle, when all its objects are violative of the constitutional compact, and absolve the States from allegiance to the Federal Union.

Before I advance further in my remarks, to a proper apprehension of my views, it is necessary to examine the true nature of our Federal Government and the relation of the States to it. It was created by the States by the advice and with the consent of their people, and is the act of State sovereignty. Its powers embrace only subjects of a general nature, and such as appertain to the relations between the States of the Union, and of this with foreign Governments, while all that relates to the civil rights of our people is reserved to the States respectively. It acts upon measures only which relate to sovereign States, and not to individual citizens. It is a league, a compact between the States, and not a union, as contended for by many of our ablest statesmen.

The first contract between the States, after the commencement of the Revolution, was only a league—an alliance. And to strengthen which, the convention was called which framed our present Constitution; and that convention referred that Constitution to the States, and not to the people of the Union, for ratification. They could have made no other disposition of it. If they had referred it to the people to approve or reject, it would have been an invitation to high treason against the States. The people of the States could do nothing towards forming an alliance or union without the permission of the State, and only then through the State as the sovereign. Each State was a separate and distinct sovereignty—complete, full, and perfect; and the people who resided therein were her citizens, and due her, individually, allegiance. Had they attempted to take from the State of which they were citizens any portion of its sovereignty, to be transferred to another Government, they would have been in rebellion to the State, and punishable as traitors. The people, then, without an act of revolution, could not have transferred one particle of the sovereignty of the State to the present Government. Nor could the States have done it without the consent of the people.

No Government can transfer one or all of its citizens to another State without his or their consent. And in the act of forming our present Federal Government, it required the concurring consent of each State and its citizens; and as an evidence that the Congress which proposed the convention so regarded it, the proposition was submitted to the States, and not the people as such. The States, feeling that they had no power to part with a portion of the sovereignty vested in them, consulted the people in regard to doing it, and obtained their consent. The States, then, having created the Federal Government, stand between it and its citizens; and in all questions involving the exercise of political power by the Federal Government over the citizen, is the arbiter, and it is her duty to decide how far she surrendered sovereignty to the Federal Government; and that decision is final. This leads me to the conclusion that the States covenanted with each other, and that the Federal Union is the result of that covenant. Each of the States having surrendered an equal amount of sovereignty for the common good of all, the residue

and most essential portion each retained. All that which appertains especially to our domestic interests and rights to property, is reserved to them. They alone have power over questions relating to property, to personal security, religion, the elective franchise, and such other subjects as their citizens have an immediate interest in. On the other hand, the powers of the Federal Government extend to measures, not people—to great questions of public and national policy.

Now, this being the true nature of our Government, whence comes the authority for a majority of States to combine, and force upon the minority a system which oppresses them, although it may increase the wealth of that majority? If there is no such right, why make the Federal Government a party to this dynastical struggle between the two antagonistical systems of labor? And I may ask what she can do in this controversy? What right has she to interfere in a contest between the slave-labor system of Mississippi and free labor of Massachusetts? and why does Massachusetts invoke her aid? Has she the power to emancipate the slave? I answer, no! The question of what shall and what shall not be property is one for the decision of sovereignty, and is one of the powers reserved to the States, and does not appertain to the Federal Government; and any effort by her to exercise it would be a positive usurpation of power which would absolve the States from their allegiance. The general welfare would not authorize it.

But if, sir, by a usurpation of power this Government shall hereafter make herself a party to this supposed struggle, and in disregard of the rights of the States deprive their people of this slave property, what would be its effects upon the present and future of this great country and the world? You would strike down three million of laborers now engaged in the cultivation of the soil, thereby reducing the productive wealth of the nation not less than two billion dollars, and render idle three billion more of real estate and agricultural implements. The sudden destruction of this vast sum would produce a shock from which the monetary affairs of the world would not recover in the next five hundred years. It is the products of the labor engaged in the cultivation of the soil that adds permanently to the general wealth of a nation, and gives prosperity to her people. Now, render inoperative and unproductive this five billion of land and labor, the real productive wealth of the nation, and your prosperity which now culminates at its zenith will be turned back to the horizon to linger in feebleness, and ultimately be overcast in the darkness of anarchy. Thus reduce the annual products of this country, and the millions of money which it has heretofore attracted and now attracts, for investment, would seek other lands and other climes more congenial to its wants.

Mr. Chairman, there is now brought into this country, from the States of Europe, more than two hundred million dollars annually to be invested in agricultural products; and this vast sum is an addition to the wealth of this nation; and is that, sir, which gives life and activity to commerce, and diffuses a wide-spread prosperity which enters into all the pursuits of our people, and is enjoyed by the industrious and energetic alike. Destroy, then, and render idle this vast

amount of property, and this sum will cease to come here; will find other marts for investment; and where now flows a golden stream of riches will be seen stagnation and poverty. I will not, to-day, undertake a review of the commercial condition of the world up to the period of the introduction of slave labor into this country, and the production of cotton by it. It is sufficient for my purpose to say, that industry, the mechanic arts, commerce, civil and religious liberty, have advanced with a rapidity which startles the contemplation; destroy it, and the reaction will equal the advance, and the dark ages will be restored.

The operatives in the free States, who depend upon their daily labor to procure the means for the support of their families, would be left without employment, and would see their country reduced to a state of ruin which no imagination can portray. If gentlemen imagine that this dark picture can be avoided by the introduction into the rice, cotton, and sugar regions of the South of free white laborers, or by a reorganization of the African emancipated labor, they are mistaken. The African can only be made to labor as a slave, and under compulsory power. The white man never has performed, and never will perform, the labor necessary to the successful development of tropical regions. But suppose you could successfully reorganize a system of labor suited to the cultivation of rice, sugar, and cotton: it would require time, during which, so deep would become the ruin of this country, that it would require many generations before the shock could be recovered from. Suppose the present annual products of slave labor should be stopped for five years: your spindles, which, as an item of national and individual wealth, equal \$1,000,000,000,000, would be forever destroyed, and those now in their employ left without bread. In the destruction of agriculture and manufactures, commercial prosperity would be involved; and then would set in a dark, long, dark night, upon our common country.

Thus I have shown that, by the emancipation of the slave, the accumulation of national wealth which has so successfully progressed in this country would be arrested, and national bankruptcy produced. In this condition of the country no one is benefited, and especially the poor or the laborers; because in national, not individual, wealth, does the interest of the poor lie. National wealth falls upon all classes, like the dews of heaven, alike; while individual wealth is the cold, sordid, miserly tyrant, that demands the letter of the bond, although it exacts the last drop of blood.

I have thus far, Mr. Chairman, considered this question in its effects upon national prosperity. I have not, and shall not, to-day examine its immediate operation upon individual interest, or the section of the Union to which I belong. Enough, in times past, has been spoken and written on that subject. I leave the friends of this measure to consult their own hearts, and then afford the answer. It will tell them that seas of blood, an era of anarchy, a disorganization of society, and a rending of the Government, like the oak by the lightning bolt, must be the consequences.

But many tell me this is not the aim of the struggle. Then, I ask, what is it? Certainly no great contest like this can commence and continue, shaking a great country to its foundation, having no motive. The fraternal feeling of this numerous

and mighty people ought not to be causelessly riven and rent. It is the consummation of wickedness to excite in the minds of thirty million freemen a storm mightier than the winds of heaven, for no other purpose than to hear its wild wailing, and to behold the grandeur and sublimity of its terrific sweepings. And he who would do it deserves the maledictions of earth and the vengeance of heaven. If this is not the motive, then assert it, that the quiet calm of civilization and religion may be restored to the South, and the fiery breath of fanaticism extinguished in the North. But, sir, it is untrue that this struggle is without motive; it may not be the same with all, but it has a motive. With some it is, doubtless, the emancipation of the slave. With others it is the destruction of the equilibrium in the political power of the two sections of the Union, and the concentration in the hands of the free States the balance, to be used in inflicting upon the slave States, by legislative aid, a system too oppressive to be endured; a system alike oppressive upon every branch of industrial labor; a system which must place at least the agricultural industry of this country at the mercy of every other pursuit in which civilized man is engaged—the chief measure of which system is the tariff, falsely denominated protection of American labor, but truly the fosterer of individual capital.

Mr. Chairman, I shall not to-day, in the consideration of this subject, enter into detail and show by statistics the true effects of a protective tariff upon the industry of the people of this country. I shall content myself with a general view of it. It is a system of bonuses; and that bonus inures to the capitalist, and not the laborer—augments individual wealth and does not reward individual toil. It proposes to keep down the competition of European capital, not European labor. The true interest of labor is to increase the competition of capital, so as thereby to increase the profits of labor. A protective tariff has not this effect. The assertion that it does is merely plausible, not real. It is not so much the price of labor which gives individual prosperity, as it is the cheapness of consumption. High wages is always consumed by high consumption; and to render consumption cheap, we should have the whole world for a market.

You impose, sir, a duty of fifty per cent. upon an article imported into this country from a foreign State. This sum must be paid by the consumer, and that consumer is the laborer, as well as any one else. Who, then, gets the advantage of this fifty per cent.? It is the capitalist engaged in the production of that particular article, and the consumption of that article costs the capitalist less by fifty per cent. than it costs others. This assertion requires explanation; it is easily afforded: A invests \$100,000 in an establishment for the manufacture of cotton goods; he employs laborers—does not own them; he pays wages. The labor thus employed costs \$100,000, and it produces \$100,000 of fabric. The laborer has been paid. Now, by the aid of the tariff, the capitalist is enabled to add fifty per cent. to this \$100,000 of fabric, making its consumable value \$150,000. Now, who gets the benefit of the \$50,000 thus added? Not the laborer; his wages are not increased; he has received his wages before this addition is made. It is the capitalist. Who is injured? The laborer;

because he must consume, and consume a portion of this very fabric, and is compelled to pay this fifty per cent. without any increase in the utility of the article since it came from his hands; because this fifty per cent. does not increase the utility of the article, but only its consumable value.

But suppose you tell me that the capitalist, by having the power to add this fifty per cent., is enabled thereby to increase the wages of the laborer: still the increase in the consumable value is far greater than in the wages, and the laborer is injured. The capitalist himself is benefited in another way; he consumes at the cost of making the fabric, and not at its consumable price. The argument might hold good if, in every instance, the laborer was also the capitalist; but even then the law would be unjust, because it would enable the laborer in this particular branch of industry to impose this burden of fifty per cent. upon every other branch of industry, and especially upon agriculture, which, from its very nature, cannot procure from legislation similar aids. The true value of every fabric is the cost of material and price of labor, and that should be its consumable value. But the tariff enables you to increase its market value fifty per cent., which is a burden upon consumption, for individual benefit, and, to the extent of the duty imposed, diminishes consumption, and thereby lessens the value of labor.

The proposition that a tax imposed upon an article of consumption increases its market price to that extent, will not, I apprehend, be denied. If, then, the market price is increased, it will require a much larger amount of labor to obtain it; which necessarily diminishes the consumption, or increases the price of labor. If it diminishes the consumption, it will prejudice those engaged in that branch of labor, because less labor will be required to supply the demand; and whenever demand is diminished, of course labor must cheapen, because of the competition produced by a surplus number of hands. To illustrate: the price of cotton fabric has been increased fifty per cent. by the aid of a duty imposed by the Government in its favor; of course, with the same amount of money I must purchase a third less, and as the consumption has been diminished one third, the demand for labor must be diminished in a like proportion; and thus competition is increased, and thus labor is cheapened, and the whole benefit inures to the capitalist.

But suppose you deny this position, and assume that the price of labor will be increased, because the capitalists will be able to pay higher rates: I will show the assumption to be founded in error; first, because it is not the nature of capital to pay more than it is compelled; and, secondly, because, although his profits would be greater upon what he sold, yet he would sell so much less that there would be no inducement to increase wages, as competition would keep it down.

And again: suppose the price of labor in that branch of industry should be increased: would it result to the benefit of the laborer? I think not. The laborer must consume, and is interested in cheap consumption; and if you increase the price of consumption one third, and labor one third, it would be the same in its results, as if both remained at the lower rates.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I have shown that the

common day-laborer, at the North is not benefited; if not, I shall certainly show that the landowner from one end of this continent to the other is deeply injured. Now, buying and selling is but an exchange of commodities, and no one is able to continue long to buy who creates nothing. Now, when you increase the cost of consumption, you either diminish the amount used, or require a much larger amount in exchange for it. This diminishes the value of the articles given in exchange; and of course diminishes the profits of labor, and of course the price of labor. This diminution must extend to the landlord, who consumes fabric and creates raw material. I confess, if the laborer worked for himself, and owned the fabric when made, the duty imposed would then enhance the profits of his labor; but that is not the effect when the capitalist is the owner of the fabric. I confess, also, that if the farmer who owns and works his own land could impose a duty of twenty-five per cent. upon the raw material, his profits, too, would be increased; but this he cannot do, and consequently he is oppressed by the operation of the rule.

To be a little more specific: take the States of Massachusetts and Mississippi. The one manufactures, the other cultivates the soil. The one creates fabric, the other raw material. The farmer of Mississippi needs for consumption such fabrics as Massachusetts produces; but he can obtain the same article from the English manufacturer. The Englishman proposes to sell a given quantity of his fabric to the Mississippi farmer for \$100, and will take the farmer's agricultural products in exchange at a given price. The Massachusetts manufacturer cannot afford to take less than \$150 for the same amount of the same fabric, and is only willing to allow the same price for the farmer's products. The Government interposes in favor of the Massachusetts vendor, and against the farmer; requires the English vendor to pay fifty per cent. duty before he is allowed to offer his article. This compels him to increase the price of his article fifty per cent., and the farmer to take it at that price. It is a tax on the farmer of fifty per cent.; and transfers from Mississippi to Massachusetts one third of the labor of the farmer without consideration, by increasing the consumable value of the article purchased.

Thus, it will be seen that no class of laborers is benefited. Then, who is? I repeat again, capital. And this, sir, brings me back to the proposition asserted by me, in my opening remarks, that there was no conflict between the two systems of labor. They are dependent upon each other, and mutually contribute to produce the greatest national prosperity. Antagonism can only exist where the labor is the same, and then only because of a superabundance. If there were more capital and labor engaged in the production of iron than the consumption demanded, there would then be antagonism. So in the manufacture of cotton goods. But between free and slave labor no such antagonism can exist. It is differently employed. The highest prosperity of the one has its dependence upon the other. Slave labor, everywhere, is confined to the cultivation of the soil, and limited to the production of cotton, rice, sugar, tobacco, hemp, and breadstuffs; and these are the very articles upon which free labor depends for success. What would your

cotton factories do without slave labor? The history of the world shows that cotton has never been successfully raised where slave labor did not exist. And what would they do without sugar, breadstuffs, &c.? Slave labor is peculiarly suited to agriculture, and especially in tropical climates; while commerce, navigation, and the mechanic arts, require a higher degree of intelligence, possessed only by the white man.

From the triumphs and perfection of agriculture these latter pursuits derive their success, and let it be impaired or destroyed, and they will sink into ruin and decay. The true interest of each system of labor demands that the disproportion between them should not be too great, and especially in favor of free labor, since that, deriving its prosperity from slave labor, will become aggressive, as it has been from the foundation of the Government. A commerce is carried on between them by an exchange of commodities, thus enabling the votaries of each to obtain the necessities as well as the luxuries of life. Thus it will be seen that the two systems are dependent, and not antagonistical. The argument has its existence in an ingenious device originating with capital, which is waging an eternal war upon labor, in every form and in every clime; intruding its hideous avarice into all the pursuits of men, robbing them of the profits of their labor.

The antagonism is between capital and labor, both free and slave; between which it would induce a conflict to advance its profits. Its constant cry is cheap labor and dear consumption. It keeps labor at the lowest possible ebb, while it demands the highest rates for all it sells. Thus it has been in all ages of the world. When, since society existed in a distinct form, have we not had combinations of capital, with a view to concentrating a controlling colossal power to be used in making the rich richer and the poor poorer? When, in years of scarcity, has it not been used to purchase the entire provisions of the country, and then demand prices so exorbitant as to put it beyond the means of the laborer, leaving him and his family to suffer with hunger? Who now are the champions of this struggle? It is those engaged in the service of capitalists. Who originated capitalists? Men engaged in class pursuits, and who now demand, and have been demanding for so many years past, protection for their capital against labor. Protection which will enable them to rob labor; and when they had failed to effect this by argument, when they discovered there was intelligence in this country to detect the error in their argument, and that our people refused to be misled by them, they changed their tactics, and assailed the prejudices of the human heart, by presenting, in an aggravated and false form, the condition of the slave, and appealed in favor of his right to be free and equal with the white man.

Thus the fanaticism of the whole North was awakened into action, and when they discovered this Government shaken to its foundation, and the Union in danger, they have ingeniously diverted the direction of the storm, and now say they are not for emancipation; but announce an antagonism in the two systems. It is due to truth and candor that they shall make known their real object. If it is true there is antagonism, they do intend emancipation; because that is the only

mode of terminating it. If it is true that they are not for emancipation, then it is an admission there is no antagonism; and, if no antagonism, the object of this storm, which they are getting up, is to enable capital so to use the Government as to enslave the white as well as the black man. And now, I ask, will the laborers of the North lend themselves to this foul fraud, and ripen into success this despicable conspiracy against their interest? I ask the people South if they would not prefer to see this Union discovered than endure the operation of a system which is to transfer, as I have shown, the one fourth of the net proceeds of their labor to northern capitalists annually.

I repeat, Mr. Chairman, this is a contest between capital and labor—a contest of power against weakness; a contest in which the pride of the freemen of this country is to be humbled and their spirits broken, until they will consent to any degradation, even serfdom; and from this, Mr. Chairman, if our people desire to escape, they must stand by the Democratic organization, and thereby perpetuate the great doctrine of limitation on the powers of the Federal Government, and the absolute right of the States to legislate alone upon subjects which concern their domestic and civil rights—doctrines which leave the people of each State with the full and undivided right to pass for themselves laws suited to their climate, soil, and industrial pursuits.

The perpetuation of the nationality of that party with its principles, leaves every branch of industry free to pursue its own course of policy, and compels it to stand upon its own inherent merits. In its long and brilliant course of triumphs on this continent, it has given no cause of complaint to our people; its career has been unfelt, oppressively. It has discouraged sectionalism and discountenanced class legislation. Against it all class interest have combined and wage war of extermination; not because the party had done too much; not because the party had used the power of the Government to advance one interest at the sacrifice of another; but because it had refused to do this—not because it had used the power of the Government to interfere with the domestic interest of the people of the different States, but because it had refused to do it; not because it granted monopolies and gave bounties, but because it had declared that these powers did not belong to the Government; not because it had not vindicated the honor and glory of the nation, when assailed, but because sensitive to national honor it had resented national wrongs; not because it had not used all honorable means to extend our dominion and propagate our free institutions, but because this it had done; not because it had used the power of the Government to prevent the full development of the various sources of wealth and the various branches of industry of our country—our whole country, this it had done, and we see it in the facts that to-day our people are the happiest on earth, the freest on earth, and prosperous beyond all parallel in the past or present history of the world. Nowhere else is wealth so generally diffused amongst all classes, and industry so unrestrained and unrestricted as here. And now, at this point of exalted prosperity, capital has excited this storm which appeals the heart of our people for the future of our country; and amidst the conflicting

elements our only hope to arrest the storm and save the country from ruin and anarchy is the Democratic organization. Let it go down, and disorder and carnage and anarchy and despotism must result. The free-labor system having obtained possession of the Government, will bring all its powers to their aid; and that which is now denominated a struggle becomes a conflict which must be settled by the sword, unless the slave-labor system consents ignobly to yield to the dominant party. Will they do it, Mr. Chairman? Do you believe they will? Does any man here to-day believe they will? I tell you, no! Look you at the breathless quiet which rests upon the whole slave region. Do you apprehend it? It is the

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est, but dauntless. His struggle must be ended and sectional strife terminated. As long as the Democratic party is continued in the ascendant, it will be kept in check, and when that party shall fall, the sword must and will do its work. Let justice direct our councils, and amidst the crumbings of European thrones we will remain a unit and a pride—happy and free.

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